[English]

Export of Soil

2199. DR. M. JAGANNATH : Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the attention of the Government has been drawn to a news item captioned "India exporting its soil abroad almost for free" appearing in the *Asian Age*, dated June 28, 1997;

(b) if so, the facts of the matter reported therein; and

(c) the steps proposed to be taken to protect flora and fauna in the country?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (PROF. SAIFUDDIN SOZ) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) The news item has referred to a study by the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI), Canada, according to which 25 microbiological organisms of India have been patented by US based drug manufacturing companies including Bristol-Myers, Lepetiti Labs, Pfizer and Merck. It has been reported that the current export-Import policy, the Indian Wildlife Protection Act and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species do not regulate export of soil samples or microbiological organisms from India. The news item further refers to the meeting of experts organised by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in New Delhi on 10 June, 1997 on the subjects of developing a national legislation to govern transfer of and access to the flora and fauna of the country.

The Government is aware of the study of RAFI. Patents referred to in the study have been granted for products or processes based on the microorganisms. Microorganisms themselves have not been patented. It is true that at present Export Import policy, the Indian Wildlife Protection Act 1972, and International Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species do not regulate export of soil samples or microorganisms from India.

The Ministry of Environment & Forests had organised consultations in New Delhi on 10 June, 1997 in which the subject of developing a legislation to regulate access to biological resources of the country formed part of the agenda.

The Ministry of Environment & Forests is in the process of finalising a legislation to regulate access to the flora and fauna including the microorganisms contained in soil or sediment of the country.

Smuggling of Arms and Drugs in North-Eastern States

2200. SHRI KESHAB MAHANTA : Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government are aware that smuggling of arms and drugs is taking place via North-Eastern States;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps taken or proposed to be taken by the Government in this regard ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI MOHD. MAQBOOL DAR) : (a) to (c) Yes, Sir. The Security Forces deployed along the borders have been alerted and are kept apprised about any reports of smuggling of arms and drugs. Narcotics Control Bureau have taken several steps in close coordination with the Governments of North-Eastern States for checking smuggling of drugs and the position is reviewed from time to time at various levels. Besides modernisation/upgradation of State Police Forces by grant of Central finanical assistance, information received from various sources is shared with the State Governments for taking appropriate steps for checking smuggling of arms and drugs, The other steps taken are to intensify patrolling in the border areas, erection of observation Post Towers, increase in the number of Nakas, supply of sophisticated gadgets including night vision devices, jeeps, tractors, motor cycles and motor boats as well as the reduction of gaps between Border Out Posts in vulnerable areas.

[Translation]

Santhal Tribal Refugees

2201. SHRI SIBU SOREN : Will the Minister of WELFARE be pleased to state :

(a) whether lakhs of Santhal tribal refugees are living in a very pitiable condition in the refugee camps in certain areas of Kokarajhar district of Assam and there is acute shortage of food, drinking water, shelter, medical facilities and proper care;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the arrangement made for them;

(c) whether a Parliamentary Group of five members recently visited these refugee camps and found the arrangements unsatisfactory; and

(d) if so, the steps being taken by the Government to provide compensation to them and the arrangements made to sent them back to their homes?

THE MINISTER OF WELFARE (SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA) : (a) to (d) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Forest Land

2202. SHRI D.P. YADAV :
SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN :

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state :

(a) the area in hectares of forest land in Uttar Pradesh and other States shown as barren land;